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Government
Publications

Feedback!

How figures from your
business become statistics
that you can use

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Statistics Canada Statistique Canada

Feedback!

— how figures from your forms
become statistics you can use

Government
Publications


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Introduction

"All I do is fill out the forms. I don't know what happens after that."

Some respondents to Statistics Canada surveys may wonder where the information they supply goes and how it is used. *Feedback!* is designed to bridge that gap.

Feedback! will really succeed if it encourages information suppliers to become statistics users. Businessmen, in particular, have much to gain from official data.

This brochure, then, represents an attempt to be helpful to those who help us do our job as the country's central statistical agency. Included are brief explanations on why statistics are needed; who must do the job; how surveys generate statistics on various aspects of the nation; what is being done to relieve paperwork; what is meant by some of the statistical jargon; and, finally, where to go for assistance in finding and using the statistics you need.



We hope respondents who read this brochure will be able to say,

“Now I understand why my figures are needed. I’ve had some feedback.”

Why Statistics?

Our answer takes the form of another question: where would we be without them?

Statistics tell things as they are. They can indicate which direction to take. Without them as a mirror, the country would not know what it looks like – its features would be blurred.

Statistics, for example, aid local authorities in planning for hospitals, schools, day-care centres, parks, playgrounds, senior citizen housing, public transportation and so on. Many agreements among governments call for the transfer of funds to towns and cities based on their population.

A great many business surveys have grown out of requests from the business world – not just governments – for information on production, shipments, wages, cost of materials, ownership, profits and suchlike. Executives in both large and small firms rely on statistics in decision-making, particularly in researching new markets, developing new product lines, locating bank branches, supermarkets, shopping centres and establishing new plants, to list a few examples.

In our increasingly complex world, facts, facts and more facts are needed every day.

Who Must do the job?

Given the need for statistics, the question arises: who will do the job? Various bodies have collected statistics since early pioneer days. To avoid duplication of effort and to establish and maintain highest possible standards, the federal government in 1918 set up a central statistical agency – the Dominion Bureau of Statistics. The name was changed in 1971 to Statistics Canada with a renewed mandate

I
DIDN'T KNOW
THAT!



under the Statistics Act to “collect, compile, analyse, abstract and publish statistical information relating to the commercial, industrial, financial, social, economic and general activities and condition of the people.”

Within the bureau, business statistics are the responsibility of specialists dealing with manufacturing and primary industries . . . transportation and communications . . . merchandising and services . . . construction . . . prices . . . labour . . . finance . . . external trade.

These specialists carry out many surveys each year, often through the regional field offices whose main job is data collection.

In the final analysis, of course, the job of feeding the statistical mill falls in large measure on survey respondents. They are the system's most vital asset.

How Surveys Generate Statistics

While survey respondents are vital to the system, the surveys themselves must be sound. Surveys must be conceived, planned and conducted in scientific fashion. For its work, Statistics Canada employs some 800 survey statisticians, research and mathematical statisticians who are supported by other specialists all down the line.

The trend today is towards collecting information from administrative sources such as income tax returns so as to reduce paperwork, but in many cases we still must go directly to individuals, firms and institutions with questions. We promise confidentiality to all respondents and, in turn, request timely and reliable answers.

When detailed information is needed at intervals of a year or more, the survey will often take the form of a census, that is complete coverage of a people, industry or class of business. For smaller, more frequent surveys, sampling will generally do the job: scientific selection, for example, allows us to survey only 10 per cent of retailers and still produce valid estimates of monthly retail sales for each



province and for the entire country. Business surveys using sample techniques include various commodity surveys, monthly manufacturing shipments, inventories and orders, capital and repair expenditures, retail trade and employment.

Each survey has its own pattern: some are mail out/mail back, some are by personal interview, some by telephone and some a mixture of these methods. In all cases, the survey, to be a success, must collect answers to all questions and within the deadlines. Again, the co-operation of respondents is vital.

What is Being Done to Relieve Paperwork

Despite popular belief, Statistics Canada accounts for only 20 per cent of the total reports that businesses are required to fill out. We are leading the way with efforts to further reduce paperwork through the substitution of income tax returns, provincial administrative data, and customs documents for statistical questionnaires, more use of sampling and short forms for small businesses; and even complete elimination of surveys that no longer serve their original useful purpose.



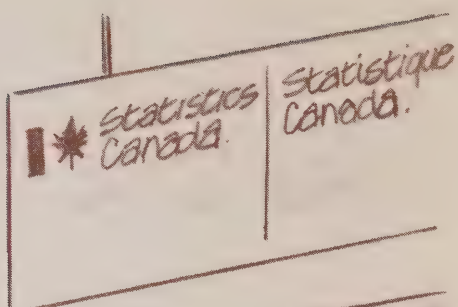
As part of the federal government's recent spending reductions, Statistics Canada cancelled a number of surveys and publications and modified some others. This action, along with the wider use of administrative data, is bringing about a sizeable reduction in paperwork for the business community.

Highlights of Available Data

The bureau's outputs are used for important decisions every day as governments, companies, institutions and individuals come to grips with problems that need to be described in statistical terms before they can be analyzed and resolved. Among the statistics most in demand are the following:

Consumer Prices: Collection of over 100,000 price quotations on about 400 items in 51 cities from coast to coast takes place monthly to produce the Consumer Price Index (CPI). As the most widely used indicator of changes in the cost of living, the CPI is put to work in many pocket-book situations such as higher exemptions for income tax payers and adjustments in labour union contracts, old age pensions, unemployment insurance benefits, rents, insurance and alimony payments. Many indexes and breakdowns are published and the data are also available from CANSIM, the bureau's computerized data bank. In fact, many of the statistics discussed in this overview are in CANSIM which is easy to access by means of a computer terminal in your own office once you have signed up for the service.

Employment/Unemployment: Answers to vital questions about the work-life of the country are produced each month by the Labour Force Survey. One of our largest on-going sample surveys, it contacts 55,000 households containing 170,000 people. The result is a reliable body of information for advisors, policymakers and elected officials in local, provincial and federal governments as well as business and union leaders. The employment and unemployment figures are used as indicators



of what is taking place in the economy before results from most other surveys are available. The Labour Force Survey and the Consumer Price Index are the bureau's most closely watched surveys, receiving wide publicity in the media.

National Accounts: The overall performance of the economy is portrayed on a regular basis by the System of National Accounts. This system brings together economic indicators to form what could be called the financial statements of the nation. Included are the gross national product, gross national expenditure, sources of personal income, balance of international payments, capital information, productivity indexes, taxation, government spending, corporation profits and so on. Millions of economic transactions are brought together and summarized in reports that are of particular value to executives in the highest levels of business, industry and government.

Financial Data: Various publications are produced on the financial and taxation statistics of corporations, with information on income, expenses, profits, and selected financial ratios. Users include company executives who compare their performance with the totals and averages for other firms in their industry or type of business.

External Trade: Using customs documents, Statistics Canada compiles monthly and annual statistics on imports and exports. Details are available on commodities, country of origin or destination, and province of lading or province of clearance. As key indicators, these figures are vital to Canada as a trading nation and can be used by even the smallest firms for market research studies, export markets, opportunities for import substitution and so on.

Census of Manufactures: An annual census of manufacturing establishments collects general information such as number of establishments, number and type of employees, total wages and salaries, cost of fuel and electricity, and value added. Also collected are facts on inputs to production, and shipments of major commodities. The results of these surveys are published in a large



number of publications, each dealing with a specific industry or group of industries. Other publications give details on the geographic distribution of manufacturing establishments. Because of the importance of manufacturing to most provinces and the nation as a whole, these reports are studied at the highest level of industry and government for policy decisions. Important censuses are also carried out periodically in other areas such as construction, agriculture and merchandising.

Construction: Two monthly publications are of special value to those interested in the construction industry. One publication deals with building permits and provides detailed facts on permits issued, by type of facility and by type of dwelling for residential dwellings. Geographic data are also provided at the provincial, census division and municipality level. The second publication refers to housing starts and completions as collected by Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The publication includes data on starts and completions by type of dwelling. Geographic detail is

available down to urban centres of 10,000 or more population. Businesses supplying this market can use these statistics to spot trends early.

Retail Trade: An important survey of retail trade produces monthly estimates of retail sales for Canada, the provinces, the territories and four major urban centres – Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver. Details are given on sales of chain stores and independent stores for 28 business categories. The statistics are useful to smaller retailers in assessing their own performance and are also of value to manufacturers, wholesalers, suppliers, and market research companies.

Household Facilities: Each spring, Statistics Canada carries out a survey of household facilities and equipment. Statistics are produced on housing characteristics, heating equipment and fuels, water supply and plumbing facilities, and ownership of various types of household appliances and other equipment such as automobiles, bicycles, telephones, and tape recorders. Suppliers use this information to keep abreast of market trends and to assess their share-of-market.

Census of Canada: The census of population and housing is an important source of information and detailed tabulations appear in a large number of publications. The appeal of the census lies in its reliability, broad range of questions, the extensive cross-classifications and geographic detail. Representation in the House of Commons is based on census figures.

Population Projections: Statistics Canada has produced a new set of population projections for Canada and the provinces to the year 2001. These projections incorporate the results of the 1976 Census and, as before, there are several different projections available based on alternative assumptions about fertility and population movements. Businessmen gauging future labour supply, branch plants, urban/rural markets and officials concerned with hospitals, schools, municipal services and so on find these projections extremely useful.

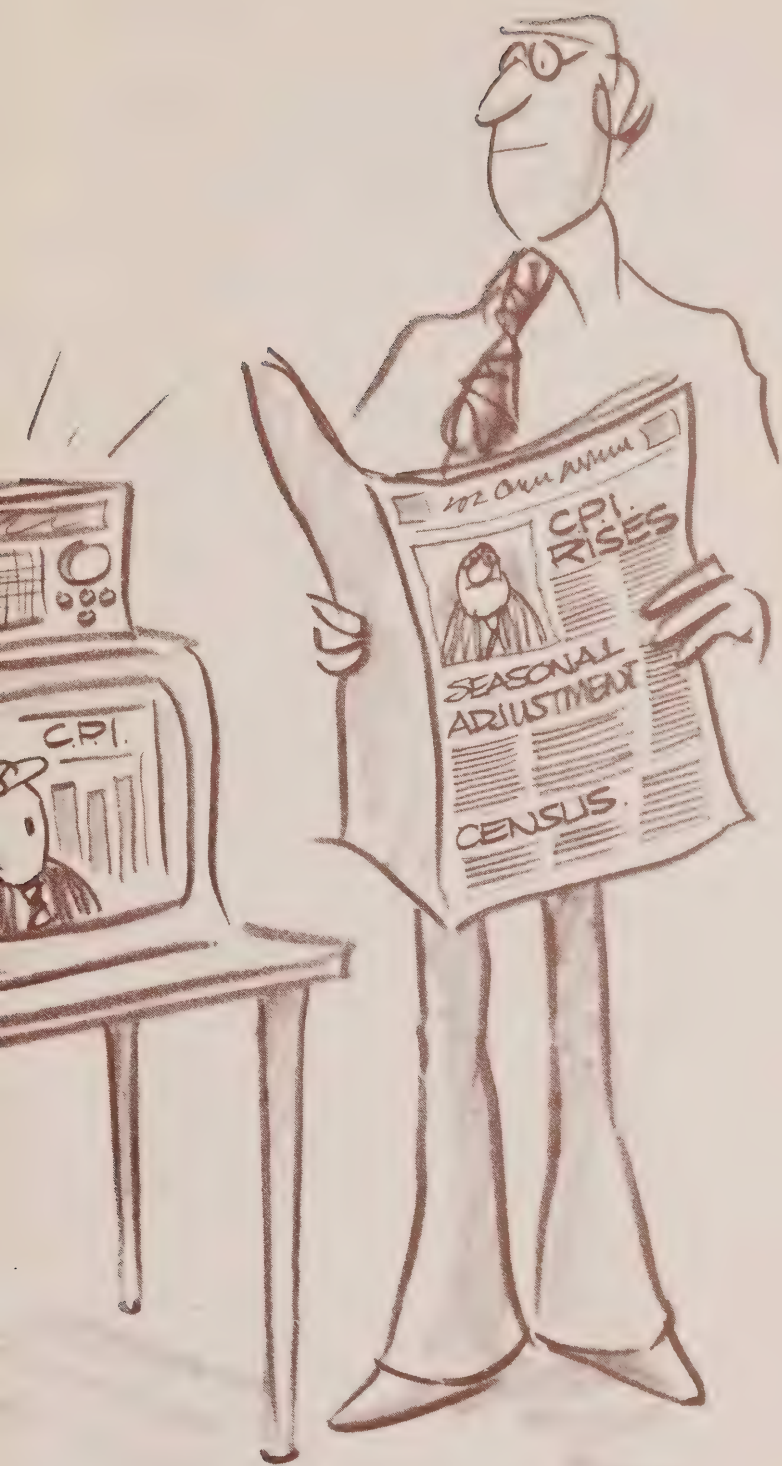
Income Distribution by Size: Statistics Canada conducts an annual Survey of Consumer Finances. Statistics include estimates of income distribution for families and unattached individuals by province. These can be broken down and cross-tabulated according to need. Businesses of all types and sizes can profit from these figures to match products to markets.

The Jargon – In a Jiffy

Even those of us who don't use statistics regularly are constantly made aware of them through news reports in our newspapers and on radio and T.V. Certain statistical jargon is used regularly.

You don't have to know the language – but it helps. So here's an everyman's guide to some of the terms:

- **SERIES** are sets of figures about a subject (such as imports).
- **TIME SERIES** are sets of figures over a period of time (such as imports over the past 10 years).
- **AN INDEX** is a device used for simplifying comparisons by expressing the base of comparison as 100.
- **CURRENT PRICES/DOLLARS:** values based on actual prevailing prices at a particular time (1979 output of cars expressed as 1979 quantities valued at 1979 prices).
- **CONSTANT PRICES/DOLLARS:** values based on actual prevailing prices during some different – usually earlier – time period (1979 output of cars expressed as 1979 quantities based on 1971 prices). These permit “real” or price-adjusted comparisons between values of different time periods.
- **SEASONAL ADJUSTMENT:** statistics are adjusted to account for seasonal factors such as weather so they reveal the real or underlying trends.
- **SAMPLING:** to save time and money, information is collected from a fraction of all the individuals or firms in a group. Sample size can be adjusted to obtain the degree of reliability required in the estimates.



- **CENSUS:** a 100% coverage of a group (such as the every five-year Census of Canada).

NOTE: More detailed explanations of these and other terms can be found in the series, *How to Profit from Facts*, available on request.

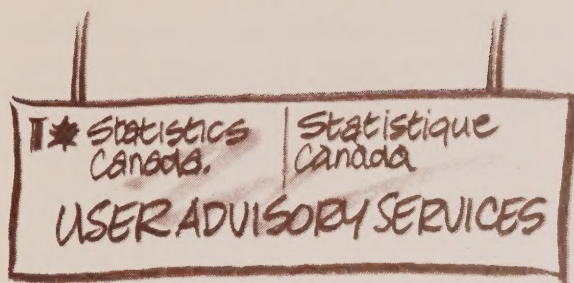
Where to Get Statistical Help

Statistics Canada stands ready to help you identify, obtain and use statistics. Our User Advisory Services has reference centres in nine cities across the country where you are welcome to telephone or drop in, use the study areas, arrange to buy one or more publications or obtain statistics from CANSIM, the bureau's computerized data bank.

Some data may also be obtained on microfiche, custom printouts or computer tapes. Ask about unpublished data and special tabulations.

Each centre maintains a collection of the bureau's publications for reference, including the following with particularly wide appeal:

- *Statistics Canada Catalogue.* Lists publications and summarizes contents. Subject-title index. Section on unpublished data.
- *Infomat.* Weekly digest of current statistical information.
- *Reference Canada.* Pocket pamphlet with facts on population, labour force, prices, the economy, social characteristics along with projections.
- *New Surveys.* Describes statistical activity within federal government.
- *How to Profit from Facts.* A series showing small businesses how to use statistics for profit: separate booklets are available for manufacturers, retailers and contractors.



User Advisory Services has staff to assist you in Central Inquiries, Ottawa (613-992-4734) and in these centres:

2nd floor
Viking Building
Crosbie Road
St. John's, Nfld.
A1B 3P2
(709-726-0713)

3rd floor
1256 Barrington St.
Halifax, N.S.
B3J 1Y6
(902-426-5331)

7th floor
1500 Atwater Ave.
Montreal, Que.
H3Z 1Y2
(514-283-5725)

10th floor
25 St. Clair Ave. E.
Toronto, Ont.
M4T 1M4
(416-966-6586)

6th floor
266 Graham Ave.
Winnipeg, Man.
R3C 0K4
(204-949-4020)

5th floor
530 Midtown Centre
Regina, Sask.
S4P 2B6
(306-569-5405)

10th floor
10025-106th St.
Edmonton, Alta.
T5J 1G9
(403-425-5052)

1st floor
1145 Robson St.
Vancouver, B.C.
V6E 1B8
(604-666-3695)

Also, toll-free access to the regional statistical information service is provided in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island by telephoning the Halifax office at 1-800-565-7192. Throughout Saskatchewan, the regional office in Regina can be reached by dialing 1-800-667-3524.

Throughout Alberta, the Edmonton office can be reached by dialing 1-800-222-6400.

We wish to thank all respondents to our surveys, particularly busy businessmen, who supply the information needed to produce sound statistics.

To us, the respondent is the statistical system's most precious asset.
